Met Office

January 2012

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1981-2010.

UK overview

The month began with very mild conditions, but a succession of active Atlantic depressions gave some stormy weather during the first week, with a major winter storm on 3rd affecting southern Scotland in particular. It was quieter in mid-month, with some low night-time temperatures, then rather more unsettled generally, with mainly westerly winds bringing weather fronts. A broad swathe of cold air spread in from the east at month's end.

The mean UK temperature was 1.0 °C above the 1981-2010 average. It was the mildest January since 2008, significantly milder than those of 2009 to 2011. Rainfall exceeded the normal amount over parts of the north, particularly northern Scotland, but was less than 75% of normal widely in eastern and southern counties, some coastal fringes here receiving less than 50%. Sunshine was well above normal for most of the UK, the exceptions being Northern Ireland, parts of western Scotland and the Western Isles; for the UK as a whole this was the 5th sunniest January since 1929.

A maximum temperature of 15.0 °C was recorded at Kenton (Devon) on the 18th. A minimum temperature of -10.5 °C was recorded at Aboyne (Aberdeenshire) early on the 16th. In the 24 hours ending at 0900 on the 5th, 89.6 mm of rain fell at Mickleden (Cumbria). A wind gust of 102 mph was recorded at Blackford Hill, Edinburgh on the 3rd. A snow depth of 8cm was measured at Aviemore (Highland) at 0900 on the 20th, and at Copley (County Durham) at 0900 on the 24th.

Weather Impacts

On the 3rd, a major storm brought very strong winds across Scotland, resulting in damage and travel disruption particularly in the Central Belt. Fallen trees blocked roads and rail lines and damaged power lines. Rail services from Edinburgh to Glasgow and Inverness to Aberdeen were suspended. The Forth, Tay and Kingston road bridges were closed, with restrictions elsewhere. Ferry services were delayed and flights from Glasgow and Edinburgh airports were cancelled. More than 100,000 Scottish homes and businesses were left without electricity, and some buildings were damaged. It was a similar picture across Northern Ireland, with travel delays, power cuts and building damage. In England and Wales, impacts included fallen trees, overturned lorries and building damage. The QE2 bridge on the M25 was closed for several hours as was the port of Dover. The event caused at least two fatalities.

Very strong winds overnight 4th / 5th caused further damage and disruption, particularly in eastern and northern England. The QE2 bridge on the M25 was again closed, with restrictions on the Humber and Severn bridges. Fallen trees and overturned lorries blocked many roads. Some train services were also disrupted due to trees and overhead wire problems.

There were strong winds again on 12th and 21st, but impacts were generally limited. The remainder of the month saw localised upland snow in various parts of Scotland, Northern Ireland, and central & western England and Wales. This and icy roads caused some minor transport disruption.

England diary of highlights

A stormy but mild start was followed by a rather changeable period that lasted most of the month. North-western areas were generally cloudier with some rain, while southern and eastern parts were drier and sunny. There was a brief settled, cold spell around mid-month, but unsettled conditions, windy at times, resumed until the last few days, which were dry and, bright, but cold; the onset of the first prolonged cold spell of the winter.

The mean temperature was 1.2 °C above the 1981-2010 average, making it the mildest January since 2008, significantly milder than Januaries 2009 to 2011. Rainfall amounts were less than 75% of normal widely in eastern and southern counties, lower still near coastal fringes, but near or above normal in the north-west. Sunshine amounts were well above normal generally, giving the fifth sunniest January over England in a series since 1929.

1st to 5th

The month began mild, with some heavy showers in the north on 1st, and a more organised spell of heavy rain affecting southern areas for a time. A wet and very windy period ensued, as a series of deep depressions crossed the country. The 3rd was particularly windy as an active cold front moved across the country with gales or severe gales to many areas, 72 mph being recorded at Crosby (Merseyside). After a brief respite on 4th, another deep low moved across the country on 5th giving another very windy day. The north of the country bore the brunt during the morning, with a gust of 93 mph at High Bradfield (South Yorkshire) in the early hours, but during the day the strongest winds transferred to eastern England, with gusts above 50 mph widely reported.

6th to 11th

This was a more benign but mild period as high pressure to the south-west brought westerly winds to much of England, allowing daytime temperatures to reach double figures quite widely. There was, however, a lot of cloud with outbreaks of rain and drizzle, especially towards the west. Eastern parts had some sunnier interludes, especially on 6th and 7th. Nights were relatively frost-free, but any clear spells did allow a few places to briefly drop below freezing.

12th to 22nd

On 12th a cold front brought a spell of rain to many parts but also introduced a colder north-westerly flow everywhere. It then turned more settled, with frost and fog, but sunshine during the day. Temperatures widely fell below freezing at night, with -5.1 °C at Benson (Oxfordshire) on 13th and -7.2 °C at South Newington (Oxfordshire) on 14th. Where any fog persisted through the day, temperatures struggled with Hereford recording a maximum of -0.5 °C on 14th. The 15th and 16th were both fine and sunny, but with overnight frost and fog patches; remaining cloudier in the far west. Milder but more unsettled weather pushed into the west on 17th, causing a significant contrast in daytime maxima, Plymouth (Devon) recording 11.4 °C but Dishforth (North Yorkshire) only 0.5 °C. The 18th and 19th were rather cloudy in the south but mild with outbreaks of light rain and drizzle. Exeter Airport (Devon) recorded maxima of 13.9 °C on 18th and 12.5 °C on 19th. In northern parts it was cooler but brighter with sunshine but also some wintry showers across high ground, windy also on 19th. The 20th was cloudy and damp, but mild. On 21st, brighter but cooler conditions returned briefly, as a cold front moved southwards; winds were the main feature with gusts of 74 mph recorded at High Bradfield, and windy again on 22nd with 77 mph recorded at High Bradfield again. The afternoon of 22nd did see the cloud break up in the east but towards the north and west further showers developed. Temperatures rose to 13.5 °C at Otterbourne (Hampshire) on 21st and 12.7 °C at Swanage (Dorset) on 22nd.

23rd to 26th

A cold north-westerly airstream moved across the country during 23rd giving a day of sunshine and showers across much of England. A cold night followed, with Benson falling to -4 °C in the early hours of 24th, ahead of another frontal system which in the east gave a brief spell of snow across higher ground; a depth of 8 cm was recorded at Copley (County Durham). Mild in the west on 24th, with maxima of 12 °C in many places, but

colder in the east in the cloud and rain with a daytime maximum of only 3.2 °C at Albemarle (Northumberland). The milder air reached all parts by 25th to give outbreaks of rain and drizzle in places. Winds also increased during the day ahead of a cold front. Colder on 26th, and showery, with snow on northern hills.

27th to 31st

The end of the month saw an area of high pressure over Scandinavia and Russia introducing a cold easterly flow. The 27th saw some wintry showers affect the north. The 28th was mostly dry and bright, but cloudier in the west. During 29th and 30th a warm front brought some rain, sleet and snow to parts of south-west England before retreating westwards, as the easterly winds began to dominate, giving cold days and frosty nights.

Wales diary of highlights

A changeable month, marked by stormy conditions to start and temperatures often above average, associated with mainly westerly weather conditions. There was a brief settled, cold spell around mid-month, and the last few days saw the onset of the first prolonged cold spell of the winter.

The mean temperature was 1.4 °C above the 1981-2010 average, making it the mildest January since 2008, significantly milder than those of 2009 to 2011. Rainfall amounts were rather below normal in most areas, and it was slightly sunnier than normal.

1st to 5th

The month started breezy and mild, with a spell of rain on 1st and occasional showers on 2nd. The 3rd saw a deep area of low pressure tracking across Scotland, bringing stormy conditions to Wales. Very strong winds affected all parts, with Mumbles (West Glamorgan) recording a gust of 71 mph and Capel Curig (Conwy) one of 86 mph, but the strongest gust recorded was at Aberdaron (Gwynedd), 93 mph. The winds were also accompanied by a spell of heavy rain during the morning. It remained very windy on 4th and 5th with further spells of rain, and during the early hours of 5th Capel Curig recorded a gust of 87 mph.

6th to 12th

The weather became more benign from the 6th onwards. It was still changeable, but with winds from the west or south-west it was generally mild or very mild. On 6th, maximum temperatures above 10 °C were recorded, and by 8th Usk (Monmouthshire) had a maximum of 13.0 °C. However, these days were cloudy and breezy with spells of rain. This pattern continued through to 12th, with north-eastern parts seeing the highest maxima, Hawarden Airport (Flintshire) reporting 12.7 °C on 10th and 13.1 °C on 11th. The 12th was the last mild, cloudy and wet day before a change to more settled conditions.

13th to 16th

This period saw the first settled and colder spell of the winter across Wales, with widespread overnight frosts. The 13th and 14th both started frosty with some fog patches in the east, especially on 14th. Although daytime temperatures were close to average in many areas, the south or south-easterly wind was noticeable on 15th. The 16th was dry again, with a frost to start and further mist and fog patches in eastern parts.

17th to 26th

The settled and colder weather gave way, as westerly winds and weather fronts started to move in again. The 17th was the first frost-free day for a while as cloud and rain arrived from the west. Outbreaks of rain continued into 18th, becoming persistent for a time before clearing south-eastwards. The milder and changeable conditions continued, and by 21st it became more stormy again with a gust of 74 mph recorded at Capel Curig. Then on 22nd further strong winds were recorded, with a gust of 72 mph at Capel Curig. The 23rd

and 24th were cloudy and mild with some rain. The 25th and 26th were wet and windy, with gusts of around 60 mph across the country on 25th, the strongest winds again at Capel Curig with a gust of 71 mph.

27th to 31st

The last part of the month saw a transition to the coldest spell of the winter so far. A showery day on 27th saw some showers falling as sleet and snow over high ground. The 28th was a mostly dry day, but with a noticeably colder feel than of late. Then on 29th a band of rain edged in from the west. The rain soon turned to snow over the Brecon Beacons, and snow started to accumulate during the evening and overnight down to lower levels across south Wales. The rain, sleet and snow edged away south-westwards again on 30th, with easterly winds and increasingly settled and cold weather becoming established by the last day of the month.

Scotland diary of highlights

The first week was mild, but very stormy at times, with a major storm on 3rd affecting southern Scotland in particular. It remained wet in the north and west, but gradually turned more settled towards mid-month, with some dry sunny days and night-time frosts, especially in eastern areas. A mainly westerly airstream brought a return to unsettled conditions later in the month, with rain and hill snow, before it turned much colder but dry at the end.

Temperatures overall were 0.6 °C above the 1981-2010 average. Rainfall totals varied widely, from more than 150% of normal in parts of the far north to only half the normal for Fife and the eastern Borders. It was sunnier than normal except for south-west Scotland and the Western Isles, and the second sunniest January in the series (since 1929) for eastern Scotland.

1st to 10th

The 1st and 2nd saw strong westerly winds, with frequent showers mainly in the north-west. The 3rd was a very stormy day, with gale-force winds and squally showers for most of the country. There was a gust of 102 mph recorded at Edinburgh Blackford Hill. The 4th started dry in the east, but rain spread from the west during the afternoon with some strong to gale-force winds again. 64.6 mm of rain was recorded at Cluanie Inn (Highland), and Dundrennan (Dumfries & Galloway) had a gust of 76 mph. The windy theme continued on 5th with gale-force north-westerlies, and a scattering of showers mainly in the north-west. A gust of 65 mph was recorded at Rosehearty (Aberdeenshire). The 6th started bright, but patchy light rain spread from the west during the morning. It remained windy with scattered showers in northern areas on 7th, then it was dull and damp on 8th with rain and drizzle for most areas. The 9th was a brighter day with sunny spells and only scattered light showers. The north-west saw some heavy rain on 10th, with 34.4 mm falling at Cassley (Highland), whilst other areas were generally dry but cloudy.

11th to 20th

A generally dry, mild but cloudy start on 11th although rain and strengthening winds spread into north-western areas by late afternoon. A windy start on 12th with Loch Glascarnoch (Highland) recording a gust of 68 mph, but winds eased during the morning to give a cooler, brighter day. After a chilly start, 13th was dry with sunny spells. The settled theme continued on 14th and 15th; after frosty mornings (down to -6 °C in parts of the Highlands and Borders), these were dry days with sunny spells. The 16th was dry with sunny spells too, after a cold and in places foggy start, with -10.5 °C recorded at Aboyne (Aberdeenshire). Another cold start on 17th, temperatures falling close to -10 °C in parts of the Highlands; scattered showers were mainly confined to the north-west. A band of rain cleared overnight to leave showers on 18th, mainly for western and northern areas, becoming wintry on higher ground. On 19th a band of showers, with snow for higher ground, spread from the west, giving a snow depth of 8 cm at Aviemore (Highland). The 20th started bright, but a band of rain spread from the south-west during the day accompanied by strengthening winds.

21st to 31st

The 21st was a day of frequent showers and strong winds, with a gust of 70 mph at Loch Glascarnoch. The 22nd saw the showers confined to northern and western areas, and the winds eased slightly later in the day. There was more sunshine on 23rd, especially in eastern areas, whereas the showers continued in the north and west. The 24th started with a band of rain (snow for higher ground) spreading from the west, although this cleared during the morning to leave a dull and cloudy day. The 25th was milder and drier than of late, with some strong winds for western areas. However, a band of rain spread from the west during the evening which cleared overnight giving a colder day on 26th with a band of rain and snow spreading eastwards for central areas during the afternoon. A frosty start on 27th, with Loch Glascarnoch recording -6.9 °C, then a bright but chilly day with only a few scattered snow showers mainly for the north, whilst 28th remained chilly but was generally dry until rain edged in to the Western Isles during the afternoon. The 29th was a bright day after a chilly start for northern areas, with scattered showers, but the south-west saw rain for much of the day. It felt cold in a south-easterly breeze; this continued into 30th and 31st which were generally dry but cloudy days.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

The month began with mild, but very stormy conditions. The westerly weather type, mild with rain at times, gradually gave way to a colder, more settled period around mid-month. The unsettled, breezy conditions resumed, with showers and bands of rain, until month end, which was fine but colder.

Temperatures for the month were 1.3 °C above the 1981-2010 average, making it the mildest January since 2007, with notably few frosts. Rainfall and sunshine amounts were close to normal overall.

1st to 10th

The 1st and 2nd saw moderate westerly winds and scattered showers. The 3rd was a stormy day with gale-force winds and squally showers, and a peak gust of 82 mph at Orlock Head (County Down). The 4th was a day of strong westerly winds and widespread rain, with 26.0 mm recorded at Lough Fea (County Londonderry) and a gust of 68 mph at Orlock Head. The 5th once again saw gale-force winds with a scattering of showers, with a gust of 70 mph recorded at Magilligan (County Londonderry). It was a bright start on 6th but light rain spread from the west during the morning, and, although 7th saw scattered light showers in the morning, these cleared to leave a bright afternoon. A band of light rain cleared to the east during the morning of 8th leaving a dull day with occasional drizzle. Patchy rain on 9th soon cleared to leave a dry and bright afternoon. The 10th was another dull day with patchy rain.

11th to 20th

The 11th was a cloudy day, with patchy rain and drizzle spreading from the north-west during the afternoon. It was a windy start on 12th, with a gust of 59 mph at Orlock Head, but the winds eased during the morning to allow for a bright but cooler day, and after a chilly start the 13th was a dry but cold day with sunny spells. The cool, settled theme continued on 14th to 16th with dry but generally cloudy days. The 17th saw a change, with rain spreading from the west during the evening, which cleared by the morning of 18th leaving scattered showers for western areas. Another showery day on 19th, with snow on high ground, and fresh or strong north-westerly winds. The 20th was a wet day with a band of rain pushing north-east, clearing by early evening.

21st to 31st

The 21st was a day of strong north-westerly winds and frequent showers, with a gust of 60 mph recorded at Killowen (County Down), and 22nd was another blustery day with more scattered showers and a gust of 59 mph at Orlock Head. The 23rd was a quieter day with winds easing, sunny spells and only a few scattered showers, whilst 24th was a generally dry but breezy day although a band of rain spread from the south-west later in the afternoon. The 25th was a mild but breezy day; however, rain spread in from the west during the afternoon, clearing overnight to give a colder day on 26th with scattered showers and snow for higher ground. The 27th was a day of frequent showers and although 28th started dry a band of rain moved in from the west during the morning to reach all parts during the day. The rain continued throughout 29th, but gradually eased

on 30th and cleared to the west during the afternoon. The 31st was a dry but colder day with a south-easterly breeze.

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